

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE:
BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE ADRIATIC

OSTMITTELEUROPA: ZWISCHEN OSTSEE UND ADRIA

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The University of Debrecen
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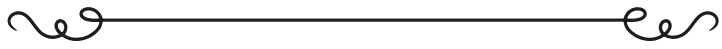
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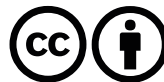
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Beyond the Western Metropolis: A Research Agenda for the Spatial History of Urban Crime in Budapest throughout the “Long” Twentieth Century

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a comprehensive research agenda for the spatial and social history of urban crime in Budapest from the city’s unification (1873) to the end of the communist regime (1989). While historical criminology has extensively analyzed the metropolises of Western Europe and North America, the distinct urbanization trajectories and spatial dynamics of deviance in East-Central Europe remain largely underexplored. Moving beyond traditional political and state-centric narratives, this study proposes a robust theoretical and methodological framework to investigate the localized realities of both the organized “underworld” and everyday criminality. Central to this agenda is a four-factor localization model that systematically analyzes the crime scene, the residence and origin of offenders, and the spatial attachments of victims. By integrating quantitative official records with qualitative egodocuments and media representations, the proposed framework captures the lived experience of urban space. Furthermore, it highlights how macro-historical crises fundamentally reshaped the geography of metropolitan crime.

Keywords: social history, spatial history, historical criminology, urban crime, Budapest, twentieth century

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Introduction

The dynamics and spatial patterns of urban crime are of profound social and historical significance. While the social history of deviance has gained considerable traction in recent decades, interrogating this phenomenon offers far more than a mere catalog of transgressions; it provides a crucial vantage point into broader structural transformations and the everyday realities of urban life. This paper proposes a comprehensive, interdisciplinary research agenda for exploring crime in the Hungarian capital, Budapest, from the city's unification (1873) to the collapse of the communist regime (1989). By defining this expansive temporal framework, we deliberately move beyond the traditional, politically driven periodizations of public history to capture the long-term continuities and ruptures in the criminal landscape of the “long” twentieth century. A broader perspective also offers the opportunity to examine the transformation of the social context of deviance over regime changes in Hungarian history. This is also significant because, while the period from the end of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of World War II – despite the political transformations and short upheavals of the revolutions in 1918/1919 – can be considered a more or less uniform era from the perspective of the history of deviance, the communist period can be seen as a phase of significant change in terms of both law enforcement and justice as well as the social background of crime.

The primary motivation for our research stems from a persistent historiographical imbalance. In general, it can be said that historically, studies in urban history and the history of crime have predominantly focused on the major metropolises of Western Europe and North America.¹ To move beyond the Western metropolis, it is imperative to examine East-Central European cities, which experienced markedly different, often phase-delayed trajectories of modernization and urbanization. Positioned at the crossroads of “East” and “West,” Budapest underwent an explosive growth, acting as a regional catalyst for social and cultural change. Applying social-historical methodologies – particularly those informed by the spatial turn² – to this specific Central European context promises novel insights that can significantly chal-

¹ Knepper, Paul, *Writing the History of Crime*. New York, 2016. 115–144.; Monkkonen, Eric, “A Disorderly People? Urban Order in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century American”, = *Journal of American History* 68, 1981, 539–559.

² Bavaj, Riccardo – Lawson, Konrad – Struck, Bernhard (eds.), *Doing Spatial History*. London–New York, 2022. – For the reception of spatial turn in Hungary see Gyáni Gábor,

lenge and refine established paradigms of nineteenth- and twentieth-century crime history.

Approaching the socio-historical trends of crime in such a complex urban environment demands a multifaceted methodological framework – one that seamlessly integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches, discourse analysis, microhistory, and the critical insights of the spatial turn. Crucially, this article is designed as a concept paper that introduces the intellectual and methodological framework of a newly established research group. Rather than presenting finalized empirical findings, it serves as a programmatic statement setting forth a rigorous research agenda to investigate how crime is localized within the urban fabric. By examining the persistent geographies of the local “underworld”³ alongside fluctuations in everyday criminality, this agenda underscores the necessity of treating the spatial characteristics of crime not merely as a passive backdrop, but as a central, dynamic analytical category.

To articulate this concept, the present study is structured as follows. The subsequent section provides the historiographical context, reviewing the current state of the art and identifying critical gaps in East-Central European crime history. Following this, we outline our theoretical framework, which focuses on the spatial patterns of both everyday and organized crime.⁴ We then pro-

“Térbeli fordulat és várostörténet”, In. *Budapest túl jón és rosszon. A nagyvárosi múlt mint tapasztalat*. Budapest, 2008. 9–21.

³ For the historical concept and operating “mechanism” of criminal “underworld” see Knepper, *Writing the History of Crime*, 2016. 124–129.; Evans, Richard J., *Tales from the German Underworld. Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century*. New Haven–London, 1998.; Shore, Heather, “A Brief History of the Underworld and Organized Crime, c. 1750–1950”, In. Knepper, Paul – Johansen, Anja (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Crime and Criminal Justice*. Oxford, 2016. 170–191.; Kalifa, Dominique, *Vice, Crime, and Poverty. How the Western Imagination Invented the Underworld*. New York, 2013.; Goeschel, Christian, “The Criminal Underworld in Weimar and Nazi Berlin”, = *History Workshop Journal* 75, 2013, 58–80.

⁴ In this paper, “everyday crime” refers to the spectrum of common offenses that ordinary city dwellers were most likely to encounter, either as victims or perpetrators. In contrast, “organized crime” – while historically and statistically less prevalent in Budapest – constitutes a structured form of deviance operated by a well-defined criminal subculture. Despite its lower actual frequency, this organized underworld consistently commanded a disproportionate share of public and media attention throughout the twentieth century. For the history of organized crime see Fijnaut, Cyrille, “Searching for Organized Crime in History”, In. Paoli, Letizia (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*. Oxford, 2014. 53–95.; Knepper, Paul, *International Crime in the 20th Century. The League of Nations Era, 1919–1939*. New York, 2011. 33–56.

pose a robust methodological approach for mapping the urban underworld and analyzing the localities of deviance. Finally, we formulate a specific set of research questions destined to guide our forthcoming empirical investigations, concluding with reflections on the broader scholarly implications of this spatial-historical endeavor.

Historiographical Context

The historical study of crime has long served as a crucial lens through which broader social structures, power dynamics, and cultural norms are examined.⁵ Methodologically, there are two basic approaches within the historical research on crime. The first to appear around the 1960s was the social history of crime, law enforcement and criminal justice – pioneered by scholars such as Michel Foucault, Erik Monkkonen, Howard Zehr or Eric Hobsbawm – relied heavily on social scientific methods, focusing primarily on statistical, comparative and discursive analysis to trace long-term structural patterns and changes in criminality.⁶ Subsequently, influenced by the cultural turn, a second paradigm emerged that prioritized the qualitative, microhistorical analysis of specific, well-documented cases. Pioneering works in microhistory demonstrated that investigating instances of deviance and norm-breaking provides unparalleled access to the mentalities of ordinary people who otherwise left little trace in official records. Scholars such as Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis illustrated how the meticulous reconstruction of individual criminal cases, transgressions, and marginal lives could illuminate the complex belief systems and social realities of the past. Together, these foundational approaches proved that crime is not merely an anomaly, but a deeply embedded social phenomenon that defines the boundaries of acceptable behavior and community cohesion.⁷

⁵ For the detailed historiographical overview see Knepper, *Writing the History of Crime*, 2016.; Lawrence, Paul, “The Historiography of Crime and Criminal Justice”, In. Knepper – Johansen, *The Oxford Handbook*, 2016. 17–37.

⁶ E.g. Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Paris, 1975.; Monkkonen, Eric H., *The Dangerous Class: Crime and Poverty in Columbus, Ohio, 1860–1885*. Cambridge–London, 1975.; Zehr, Howard, *Crime and the Development of Modern Society: Patterns of Criminality in Nineteenth Century Germany and France*. London, 1976.; Hobsbawm, Eric, *Bandits*. New York, 1969.

⁷ Ginzburg, Carlo, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. Baltimore–London, 1989.; Davies, Natalie Zemon, *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Cambridge–London, 1983.;

Building upon these early socio-historical foundations, the more recent, interdisciplinary field of historical criminology has systematically bridged the gap between historical methodology and criminological theory. This approach shifts the focus from isolated, sensational cases to the long-term, structural analysis of deviance, law enforcement, and state-building. By examining the shifting definitions of illegality and the professionalization of policing across centuries, historical criminology has revealed how modernization, industrialization, and shifting political regimes fundamentally altered both the nature of crime and the institutional responses to it. Rather than viewing crime as a static phenomenon, this paradigm emphasizes the evolving relationship between the offender, the state, and the public.⁸

A vital methodological advancement within this field has been the incorporation of “spatial turn,” which underscores the profound differences between rural and urban manifestations of crime and emphasizes the importance of space as a structuring and organizing principle. The rapid urbanization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries created new spatial dynamics of deviance, where anonymity, overcrowding, and specialized economic zones fostered distinct criminal subcultures. A pioneering example of mapping these urban realities is Charles Booth’s poverty map of London, which systematically correlated socio-economic status, living conditions, and perceived criminality across the metropolis.⁹ This early visualization of urban distress laid the groundwork for modern spatial history, demonstrating that crime is inextricably linked to the physical and social geography of the city, and that certain neighborhoods inevitably acquire “dangerous” or “sinful” reputations in the public consciousness.¹⁰

Magnússon, Sigurður Gylfi – Sziójártó M., István, *What is Microhistory? Theory and practice*. London–New York, 2013.

⁸ Churchill, David – Yeomans, Henry – Channing, Iain, *Historical Criminology*. New York, 2021.; Godfrey, Barry, “Future Perspectives on Crime History as ‘Connected History’”, = *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 21:2, 2017, 41–49; Lawrence, Paul, “Historical Criminology and the Explanatory Power of the Past”, = *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 19:4, 2019, 493–511.

⁹ Booth, Charles, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, vol. I–II. London, 1892–1902. – Booth’s poverty maps, supplemented by numerous other sources, have been digitized and made accessible by the London School of Economics and Political Science: <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map> (accessed February 27, 2026).

¹⁰ Topalov, Christian, “The City as terra incognita: Charles Booth’s Poverty Survey and the People of London, 1886–1891”, = *Planning Perspectives* 8:4, 1993, 395–425.; Gibson-Brydon, Thomas R. C., *The Moral Mapping of Victorian and Edwardian London. Charles Booth*,

In Hungarian historiography, the integration of these international trends occurred with a noticeable delay. Traditional domestic historical research has historically prioritized political history, and when it did address the twentieth century, the focus was overwhelmingly on crimes against the state and the activities of the political police under successive authoritarian regimes.¹¹ While the social history of early modern deviance (such as banditry and witchcraft)¹² has produced significant scholarly output, the organized underworld and everyday urban criminality of the modern era have received considerably less attention. Consequently, the complex methodologies of historical criminology and spatial history have yet to be systematically applied to the Hungarian context in a comprehensive, century-spanning framework.

This historiographical gap is particularly evident in the case of Budapest. While the capital's explosive growth into an Austro-Hungarian metropolis after the unification of the cities Buda, Pest and Óbuda in 1873 has been extensively analyzed by prominent social historians focusing on assimilation, housing, and everyday middle-class life, the spatial history of its underworld remains largely uncharted.¹³ The localization of urban crime, the continuity of “sinful” districts, and the specific socio-spatial disruptions caused by crises are critical missing pieces. By addressing these blind spots, our research

Christian Charity, and the Poor-but-Respectable. Montreal–Kingston, 2016.; Vaughan, Laura, *Mapping Society. The Spatial Dimensions of Social Cartography*. London, 2018. 168–204.

¹¹ E.g. Kovács Tamás (ed.), *Rendőrségi célkeresztben a szélsőjobb. Dr. Sombor-Schweinitzer József feljegyzése a szélsőjobboldali mozgalmakról, 1932–1943*. Budapest, 2009.; Müller Rolf, *Politikai rendőrség a Rákosi-korszakban*. Budapest, 2012.; Varga Krisztián, *Ellenség a baloldalon – Politikai rendőrség a Horthy-korszakban*. Budapest, 2015. – From the recent literature see Tabajdi Gábor, “Political Police in Hungary (1945–1990): A Brief Overview”, In. Germuska Pál – Rigó Róbert (eds.), *NEB Yearbook 2025*. Budapest, 2025. 321–334.

¹² E.g. Klaniczay, Gábor – Pócs, Éva (eds.), *Witchcraft and Demonology in Hungary and Transylvania*. Houndmills in Basingstoke, 2017.; Sz. Kristóf, Ildikó, “Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Hungary”, In. Levack, Brian P. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford, 2013. 334–355.; Németh, Ildikó, “Using Archival Records to Discover Hidden Histories: A Case Study of a Witchcraft Trial in Sopron, 1630”, In. Pócs, Éva – Hesz, Ágnes (eds.), *Present and Past in the Study of Religion and Magic*. Budapest, 2019. 33–45.; Brandl, Gergely, “Towards a Comparative Study of Polish and Hungarian Witchcraft Persecutions: Historiographical and Legal Perspectives”, = *Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum* 31:4, 2025, 365–382.

¹³ Gyáni, Gábor, “Uses and Misuses of Public Space in Budapest: 1873–1914”, In. Bender, Thomas – Schorske, Carl E. (eds.), *Budapest and New York. Studies in Metropolitan Transformation: 1870–1930*. New York, 1994. 85–99.; Nemes, Robert, *The Once and Future Budapest*. DeKalb, 2005.

agenda aims to position Budapest not merely as a passive recipient of Western urbanization trends, but as a primary site for examining the complex, spatialized realities of twentieth century metropolitan crime in East-Central Europe.

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to suggest a complete void in the domestic literature regarding the spatiality of modern urban crime. Recent historical and sociological scholarship has begun to address specific fragments of this complex reality. For instance, notable thematic inquiries have explored the profound impact of the World Wars on both the volume and the spatial reconfiguration of metropolitan crime, highlighting how global conflicts disrupted local social orders.¹⁴ Similarly, the evolution of urban police surveillance has received valuable scholarly attention, particularly concerning the institutionalization of spatial control methods – most notably the systematic use of police raids targeting specific marginalized groups and neighborhoods.¹⁵ Furthermore, various case studies have touched upon the social perception of distinctly “sinful” urban spaces, mapping the contested geographies of notorious public parks, entertainment districts, and specific public squares.¹⁶ However, while these important thematic studies provide essential building blocks, they have predominantly remained isolated inquiries. What is still fundamentally lacking is a comprehensive, long-term synthesis that integrates these disparate elements – post-war disruptions, law enforcement spatial tactics, and the mental mapping of deviant spaces – into a unified historical and spatial framework.

¹⁴ E.g. Kerepeszki, Róbert, “Deviance in Budapest before and after the ‘Great War’. Major Tendencies and General Features”, In. Barta, Róbert – Kerepeszki, Róbert – Kania, Krzysztof (eds.), *Trianon 1920–2020. Some Aspects of the Hungarian Peace Treaty of 1920*. Debrecen, 2021. 87–99.

¹⁵ Perényi, Roland, “Urban Places, Criminal Spaces: Police and Crime in Fin de Siècle Budapest”, = *Hungarian Historical Review* 1:1–2, 2012, 134–165.; Molnár János, “Razziák a fővárosban. A Gazdasági Rendőrség tevékenysége 1945–1948 között”, = *Múltunk* 55:4, 2010, 46–64.; Kerepeszki Róbert, “Éjjeli őrzés: Nagyvárosi ‘alvilág’ és a rendőri razziák Budapesten a 20. század első évtizedeiben”, = *Történeti Tanulmányok* 32, 2024, 133–165.

¹⁶ Perényi Roland, “A bűnös Népliget: Kriminalitás, (homo)szexualitás és öngyilkosság a főváros legnagyobb közparkjában 1896–1945”, = *Urbs: Magyar Városthéneti Évkönyv* 13, 2019, 147–170.; Perényi Roland, “Az utca diskurzusa: Budapest bűnözése és a városi tér (1873–1941)”, In. Kövér György – Somorjai Szabolcs – Kiss Zsuzsanna – Koloh Gábor (eds.), *Hogyan lett Budapest a nemzet fővárosa? Tanulmányok Budapest 150. és a Társadalom és Gazdaságtörténeti Doktori Program 30. születésnapjára*. Budapest, 2023. 459–486.; Kurimay, Anita, *Queer Budapest 1873–1961*. Chicago, 2020.

Theoretical Framework: The Spatial Aspects of Everyday Urban Crime

At the core of this research agenda lies the recognition that metropolitan crime inherently follows distinct spatial patterns. Drawing upon the foundational socio-criminological insights associated with the “Chicago School,” this framework posits that the physical and social geography of the city is inextricably linked to the organization and manifestation of deviant behavior. In the context of modern Budapest, certain localities – such as the working-class neighborhoods of Angyalföld, the bustling market areas of Józsefváros, or the public expanse of the public park Népliget – historically acquired enduring negative connotations in the minds of both the public and the authorities. These spatial patterns are deeply intertwined with the operations of an urban underworld, a “parallel society” where cooperation among various criminal actors (e.g., thieves, fences, forgers, and prostitutes) materializes. Historically and sociologically, the spatial continuity of this organized underworld in East-Central Europe remains largely unexplored, presenting a critical avenue for new research.

Crucially, however, a comprehensive spatial history of urban crime must extend beyond the confines of organized networks to encompass the broader spectrum of “everyday” criminality. This is particularly vital during periods of acute social disruption, such as wars and economic crises, when traditional normative frameworks collapse. The aftermath of major global conflicts generated unique spatial and social tensions, perhaps most visibly in the black market activities, violent crimes, thefts the profound reintegration challenges and resulting deviance among World Wars’ veterans returning to the urban environment.¹⁷ During such post-war periods, social groups that might not otherwise engage in criminal acts under “normalized” conditions often resorted to illicit behaviors, fundamentally reshaping the geography of everyday ur-

¹⁷ Emsley, Clive, “Violent Crime in England in 1919. Post-War Anxieties and Press Narratives”, = *Continuity and Change* 23:1, 2008, 173–195.; Emsley, Clive, “Future Themes and Research Agendas on Crime and Police in Wartime”, = *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 21:2, 2017, 78–82.; Gartner, Rosemary – Kennedy, Liam, “War and Postwar Violence”, = *Crime and Justice* 47, 2018, 1–67.; Roodhouse, Mark, *Black Market Britain 1939–1955*. Oxford, 2013.; Geroulanos, Stefanos, “An Army of Shadows. Black Markets, Adaptation, and Social Transparency in Postwar France”, = *The Journal of Modern History* 88:1, 2016, 60–95.; Mouré, Kenneth, *Marché Noir. The Economy of Survival in Second World War France*. Cambridge, 2023.

ban crime.¹⁸ Analyzing these transitional periods is essential for understanding how macro-level historical traumas manifest in micro-level urban transgressions.

To maintain analytical clarity and focus squarely on the social history of the city, this theoretical framework deliberately excludes offenses categorized as “crimes against the state” (such as those defined by Act III of 1921 or Act VII of 1946 in Hungary). The legal definitions of these acts were entirely contingent upon the ideological foundations of successive political regimes, rendering their spatial and social characteristics fundamentally different from ordinary urban crime. Furthermore, the investigation of political offenses and state security apparatuses has already been exhaustively covered by traditional domestic historiography, shifting the focus away from the everyday social realities of the metropolis.¹⁹

Finally, the spatial aspect of crime cannot be understood solely through the physical location of offenses; it is equally a cultural construct. Therefore, this framework conceptualizes a tripartite model of urban crime consisting of the physical metropolis, the mass media as a mediating agent, and broader cultural influences.²⁰ The modern printed press, alongside emerging cultural products like films, pulp fiction, and the phenomenon of “Americanization,”²¹ played an indispensable role in making specific crime trends and locations salient. It is through the continuous representation, dissemination, and occasional sensationalization of crime by these mediating agents that physical urban spaces are transformed into the clearly demarcated “sinful” or “dangerous” districts that populate the public’s historical “mental” map.²²

¹⁸ Emsley, Clive, “Crime and Policing in Wartime”. In. Knepper – Johansen, *The Oxford Handbook*, 2016. 519–536.

¹⁹ On the Act III of 1921 and the Act VII of 1946 see Drócsa Izabella, *Politikusok a vádlottak padján. A két világháború közötti rendtörvények dogmatikai elemzése és bírói gyakorlata*. Budapest, 2023. 109–313.; Horváth Attila, “Az 1946. évi VII. tc. a demokratikus államrend és a köztársaság védelméről”, = *Pro Publico Bona* 6:1, 2018, 94–109.

²⁰ Wood, John Carter, “Crime News and the Press”. In. Knepper – Johansen, *The Oxford Handbook*, 2016. 301–319.

²¹ Sipos Balázs, *Amerika, ezeremeletes mennyország. Amerika és az amerikanizmus a Horthy-kori nyilvánosságban*. Budapest, 2023.

²² Nichols Jr., Woodrow W., “Mental Maps, Social Characteristics, and Criminal Mobility”, In. Georges-Abeyie, Daniel E. – Harries, Keith D. (eds.), *Crime: A Spatial Perspective*. New York, 1980. 156–166.

Methodological Approach: Sources and Localities

To systematically investigate the complex social and spatial realities of urban crime in Budapest, this research agenda advocates for a mixed-methods approach that integrates the quantitative tools of the social sciences with the qualitative, interpretive methods of cultural history and spatial turn. At the heart of this methodology is the pressing need to conceptualize exactly what the “locality of crime” entails in a historical context. Rather than treating location as a mere backdrop, we propose a rigorous, four-factor analytical model of localization to deconstruct the spatiality of metropolitan deviance.

The first factor is the location of the offense. Drawing upon criminological spatial analysis, this involves examining the factors that demarcated the perpetrators’ “space of operation.” By mapping these locations, researchers can interrogate the movement patterns of offenders and their spatial decision-making processes – distinguishing, for instance, between meticulously planned offenses and haphazard crimes of opportunity. This also allows for the correlation of the crime scene with specific demographic variables, such as age, gender, and ethnicity. The second factor is the residence of the perpetrators, which shifts the focus from the public sphere of the crime to the domestic geography of the criminal. The third factor addresses the origin of the criminals. In a rapidly urbanizing metropolis like Budapest, analyzing long-term trends in offenders’ origins reveals critical insights into migration patterns, highlighting the extent to which perpetrators were deeply rooted locals versus newly arrived migrants struggling with urban integration. Finally, the fourth factor focuses on the spatial attachments of the victims (their residence, origin, and daily trajectories). By treating victims as active historical agents rather than passive sufferers, this victimological lens examines how the everyday routines and spatial presence of individuals either mitigated or amplified their risk of victimization in the metropolitan space.

Operationalizing this four-factor model requires an exceptionally diverse and meticulously cross-referenced source base. The foundation of this empirical research relies on extensive archival and official records, primarily held at the Budapest City Archives and the Hungarian National Archives. These include police, judicial, prosecution, and prison records, alongside contemporary institutional statistics. Prisoner registers and address lists are particularly invaluable for reconstructing the second and third factors of our spatial model (residence and origin). Although a part of the archival sources related to this period fell victim to World War II and subsequent scrapping, some important

conclusions can still be drawn based on the surviving police and court records. In addition to archival documents, one of the most significant sources on this topic is the annual report of the Budapest police chief, known as the Blue Book, which was published every year from the 1890s until 1921, with a few exceptions. All this is complemented by the analysis of the abundance of police literature and law enforcement periodicals published in the twentieth century.²³ Among the latter, *Magyar Rendőr* (Hungarian Policeman) is particularly interesting because the magazine, launched in 1933, survived World War II and continued to exist until the change of regime. Particularly interesting for the research of socialist era deviance are educational films produced by the police, as well as popular books of the Kádár era presenting famous criminal cases²⁴ – marking a revival of the genre of the pitaval –, and finally the television program entitled *Kékfény* (Blue Light).

However, to move beyond rigid institutional perspectives and capture the lived experience of crime, official law enforcement records must be supplemented with a broad spectrum of personal narratives. We apply an expansive definition of the term “egodocument” – one that encompasses not only traditional autobiographies, diaries, and memoirs, but also the “involuntary” or compulsory self-characterizations extracted during police interrogations, court testimonies, and medical-psychiatric evaluations.²⁵ Within this diverse corpus, the published recollections of contemporary detectives and police officers hold particular theoretical significance. Far from being mere chronologies of daily routines, these police egodocuments actively constructed a professional self-image and articulated the officers’ perceived mission to protect respectable society from urban deviance.²⁶ Furthermore, by translating personal law

²³ Some examples, see Vécsey Leó (ed.), *A 40 éves budapesti detektívtestület jubiláris albuma*. Budapest, 1926.; Turcsányi Gyula (ed.), *A modern bűnözés*, vol. I–II. Budapest, 1929.; Borbély Zoltán – Kapy Rezső (eds.), *A 60 éves magyar rendőrség 1881–1941*. Budapest, 1942.; Nemes Sándor, *Gyakorlati nyomozás*. Budapest, 1944.

²⁴ Pintér István – Szabó László, *A század nevezetes bűnügyei. A modern magyar pitaval*. Budapest, 1964.; Szabó László, *Bűnügyi múzeum*. Budapest, 1964.; Pintér István, *Rendnek muszáj lenni...* Budapest, 1974.

²⁵ Summerfield, Penny, *Histories of the Self. Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*. London–New York, 2019. 79. – On the egodocuments in general, see Mascuch, Michael – Dekker, Rudolf – Baggerman, Arianne, “Egodocuments and History: A Short Account of the Longue Durée”, = *The Historian* 78:1, 2016, 11–56.

²⁶ Some Hungarian examples to the published police egodocuments, see Gellért Ede, *Budapest bűnözői. Egy pesti detektív naplójából*. Budapest, 1925.; Hetényi Imre, *Amikor a rend őre voltam*. Budapest, 1942.; Szathmáry Róbert, *A detektív munkája*. Budapest, 1926.

enforcement experiences into accessible narratives, these works disseminated practical criminological knowledge that profoundly influenced contemporary legislation, the press, and broader public discourse.²⁷ At the same time, the ego-documents of offenders are equally indispensable for reconstructing individual criminal “career paths” and understanding the profound psychological and socialization factors that drove individuals toward deviance.²⁸ Finally, integrating local residents’ impressions and oral histories provides crucial insight into how ordinary citizens navigated, perceived, and actively labeled certain urban spaces as “dangerous.”

The third pillar of our source methodology encompasses the press, media, and cultural ephemera. The mass media played a decisive role in the discursive construction of the urban underworld. Our approach involves the critical content and discourse analysis of contemporary police periodicals, daily and weekly newspapers, criminal reportage, and the immensely popular pulp fiction of the twentieth century.²⁹ These sources not only reflect the cultural anxieties surrounding urbanization but also reveal the informal channels of information dissemination – such as gossip, rumors, and the networks of police informers – that fundamentally shaped law enforcement practices and public spatial awareness. Finally, this textual corpus is enriched by visual and spatial sources, including historical district maps and archival photography, which anchor the narrative data into the physical reality of the historical cityscape. By synthesizing these diverse types of sources, the four-factor localization model can effectively trace the continuities, ruptures, and spatial configurations of Budapest’s criminal history across the “long” twentieth century.

²⁷ For relevant historical literature employing methodologies and approaches applicable to the Hungarian context, see Clapson, Mark – Emsley, Clive, “Street, Beat, and Respectability: The Culture and Self-image of the Late Victorian and Edwardian Urban Policeman”, In: Knafka, Louis A. (ed.), *Policing and War in Europe*, vol. 16. London, 2002. 107–132.; Lawrence, Paul, “Images of Poverty and Crime. Police Memoirs in England and France at the End of the Nineteenth Century”, = *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 4:1, 2000, 63–82.; Shpayer-Makov, Haia, “Explaining the Rise and Success of Detective Memoirs in Britain”, In: Emsley, Clive – Shpayer-Makov, Haia (eds.), *Police Detectives in History, 1750–1950*. London–New York, 2006. 103–134; Saunders, Samuel. “‘To Pry Unnecessarily into Other Men’s Secrets.’ Crime Writing, Private Spaces and the Mid-Victorian Police Memoir”, = *Law, Crime and History* 8:1, 2018, 76–90.

²⁸ For an analysis of a rare surviving memoir written by a criminal, see Gilfoyle, Timothy, *A Pickpocket’s Tale. The Underworld of Nineteenth-Century New York*. New York–London, 2006.

²⁹ A good example for this method is Fritzsche, Peter, *Reading Berlin 1900*. Cambridge, 1996.

Building upon the proposed theoretical and methodological framework, this research agenda is structured around several core empirical inquiries that seek to unpack the spatial history of crime in Budapest. First and foremost, the research must empirically locate those specific parts of the Hungarian capital that were consistently branded as “criminal districts” by both the police and the public throughout the “long” twentieth century. A fundamental task is to interrogate whether these spatial configurations remained constant or underwent significant rearrangement across successive historical periods. This involves rigorously verifying qualitative cultural perceptions against quantitative statistical sources, acknowledging and navigating the inherent methodological challenges of historical crime statistics.³⁰

Secondly, the agenda emphasizes the intersectionality of urban deviance. Future research must examine how the spatiality of crime correlates with specific demographic variables, such as gender, ethnicity, age, and social status – particularly in relation to highly localized phenomena like prostitution or various forms of juvenile delinquency. To humanize these macro-level spatial trends, it is imperative to trace the individual life paths and “criminal careers” of offenders, analyzing the extent to which their personal trajectories were inexorably tied to the specificities of their local urban environments.

Thirdly, the focus must shift to the institutional and cultural actors that actively shaped urban space. Research must identify how law enforcement agencies adapted their spatial tactics – such as the distribution of police stations, patrol routes, and targeted raids – to monitor these relevant districts.³¹ Concurrently, it is crucial to analyze how the print media, alongside informal networks of contacts and information flow, contributed to the discursive localization of crime. Finally, this agenda advocates for placing Budapest within a robust comparative framework. By comparing the dynamics of the Hungarian capital with crime

³⁰ Walliss, John, “Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics? Nineteenth Century Crime Statistics for England and Wales as a Historical Source”, = *History Compass* 10:8, 2012, 574–583.; Knepper, Writing the History of Crime, 2016. 31–57.

³¹ E. g. Storch, Robert D., “The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850–1880”, = *Journal of Social History* 9, 1976, 481–509.; Von Hoffmann, Alexander, “An officer of the neighborhood: a Boston patrolman on the beat in 1895”, = *Journal of Social History* 26, 1992, 309–330.; Lindenberger, Thomas, *Straßenpolitik. Zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin 1900 bis 1914*. Bonn, 1995.; Croll, Andy, “Street Disorder, Surveillance and Shame: Regulating Behaviour in the Public Spaces of the late Victorian British Town”, = *Social History* 24, 1999, 250–268.; Thale, Christopher, “The informal World of Police Patrol. New York City in the Early Twentieth Century”, = *Journal of Urban History* 33:2, 2007, 183–216.

trends in other European metropolises (such as Vienna or Berlin), historians can determine whether the “mental maps” of sinful neighborhoods were constructed using universal urban mechanisms, or if they reveal distinct, localized Central European specificities.

Conclusion

The study of metropolitan criminal trends requires navigating a complex matrix of socio-economic structures, political upheavals, and cultural transformations. By proposing a comprehensive spatial history of crime in Budapest from 1873 to 1989, this paper outlines a framework that moves significantly beyond traditional, Western-centric paradigms of urban deviance. Integrating the quantitative tools of historical criminology with the qualitative insights of the spatial turn, this research agenda offers a vital contribution to the social history of East-Central Europe. It demonstrates that cities situated at the crossroads of the “West” and the “East” were not merely passive recipients of modernization, but rather dynamic laboratories of profound urban and social change.

At the methodological core of this endeavor is the rigorous application of a four-factor localization model. This approach effectively bridges the persistent historiographical gap between structural, macro-level analyses and the micro-level, lived experiences of historical actors. By synthesizing institutional records with the subjective narratives found in egodocuments and the discursive constructions of the contemporary mass media, this framework inspires new interdisciplinary pathways. It enables researchers to comprehensively map both the physical topography of everyday transgressions and the culturally constructed, “imagined” underworlds that so deeply permeated public anxiety.

Ultimately, investigating the criminal history of the Hungarian capital provides far more than a localized case study. It offers a critical, long-term lens through which the international academic community can re-examine the intricate, spatialized relationship between rapid urbanization, severe social trauma – such as the reintegration challenges following global conflicts – and everyday deviance. By unearthing the hidden geographies of the marginalized, the deviant, and the vulnerable, this research agenda challenges us to rethink the very nature of the modern metropolis. It suggests that to truly comprehend the evolution of the twentieth-century city, we must look beyond its grand avenues and political milestones, and venture into the shadows of its localized, “sinful” spaces.

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE: BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE ADRIATIC OSTMITTELEUROPA: ZWISCHEN OSTSEE UND ADRIA

Aims and Scope

The East Central Europe: Between the Baltic and the Adriatic (ECE) is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the Institute of History at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen. As its title suggests, the journal focuses on the history of Central Europe, covering the region between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. This region was for centuries a crossroads and meeting point where diverse ethnic groups, religions, traditions, and political entities interacted in unique ways. In addition to studies directly examining the history of the region, the editors welcome methodologically and/or theoretically relevant contributions for the analysis of historical processes.

The journal seeks to create an interdisciplinary platform to facilitate dialogue and disseminate new research on the region, whose findings are often limited in international scholarship due to language barriers and the influence of national narratives. To support this goal, ECE is an open-access journal, published at least once annually, available in both print and online formats.

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Ostmitteleuropa: Zwischen Ostsee und Adria (ECE) ist eine begutachtete wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift, die vom Historischen Institut der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Debrecen herausgegeben wird. Wie der Titel schon andeutet, konzentriert sich die Zeitschrift auf die Geschichte Mitteleuropas, insbesondere auf das Gebiet zwischen Ostsee und Adria. Diese Region war über Jahrhunderte ein Schnittpunkt und Begegnungsraum, in dem unterschiedliche ethnische Gruppen, Religionen, Traditionen und politische Einheiten auf einzigartige Weise interagierten. Neben Studien, die Geschichte der Region direkt untersuchen, erwarten die Herausgeber methodisch und/oder theoretisch relevante Beiträge zur Analyse historischer Prozesse.

Die Zeitschrift möchte eine interdisziplinäre Plattform schaffen, um den Dialog zu fördern und neue Forschungsergebnisse über die Region zu verbreiten, deren Ergebnisse aufgrund von Sprachbarrieren und der Prägung durch nationale Narrative international nur begrenzt bekannt sind. Zur Unterstützung dieses Ziels ist ECE eine Open-Access-Zeitschrift, die mindestens einmal jährlich erscheint und sowohl in gedruckter als auch in digitaler Form verfügbar ist.

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